

Proclamation 5788 of April 1, 1988

National Former Prisoners of War Recognition Day, 1988

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

It is truly fitting that America observe April 9 in recognition of our former prisoners of war; that date is the 46th anniversary of the day in 1942 when U.S. forces holding out on the Bataan Peninsula in the Philippines were captured. Later, as prisoners of war, these gallant Americans were subjected to the infamous Bataan Death March and to other inhumane treatment that killed thousands of them before they could be liberated. In every conflict, brutality has invariably been meted out to American prisoners of war; on April 9 and every day, we must remember with solemn pride and gratitude that valor and tenacity have ever been our prisoners' response.

That is clear from the words of then-Captain Jeremiah Denton, USN, when he and other U.S. prisoners of war were freed in 1973 after years of captivity in North Vietnam. "We are honored to have had the opportunity to serve our country under these difficult circumstances," Captain Denton said. Implacable and incredible courage, endurance, faith, and patriotism were behind those words—eloquent and immortal testimony to the spirit of America's Armed Forces in the Vietnam War and throughout our history.

The term "difficult circumstances" referred to nothing less than physical and mental torture, starvation, disease, separation from loved ones, and deprivation of medical treatment—an ordeal that for some, in every conflict, did not end until death. To their brave families we offer solace and salute. To our former prisoners of war who endured so much, we say that with your example and with God's help we will seek to meet the standards of devotion you have set; we will never forget your service or your sacrifice.

The Congress, by Public Law 100-269, has designated April 9, 1988, as "National Former Prisoners of War Recognition Day" and authorized and requested the President to issue a proclamation in observance of this event.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RONALD REAGAN, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim April 9, 1988, as National Former Prisoners of War Recognition Day, and I urge all Americans to observe this day of remembrance with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this first day of April, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-eight, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twelfth.

RONALD REAGAN